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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

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OCTOBER, MCMXXXVII

NUMBER 1

 THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Ivor Brown

ONE of the curious features of the early autumn was the opening of four large West-End theatres with melodrama. If artistic logic and theatrical economics suggest anything it is that the camera should take over this department of popular showmanship. Why laboriously build and sink ships and wreck trains night by night when the camera can do the job once and for all and fifty times as well? Surely storms round the light-house, riots in Hyde Park, railway smashes in Los Angeles, and oil-wells gushing in Pacific islands are matters for the film.

In theory, of course, they are. But practice demonstrates the extraordinary hold of the living actor seen and heard in person. You could see everything that Mr. Ivor Novello has to offer in "Crest of the Wave" for sixpence 'at the pictures'—except Mr. Ivor Novello and his colleagues in the flesh. For that exception a vast public pays as many shillings as they need pay pence. The story of the piece is feuilleton stuff about the penniless Duke who turns film-star. Never mind. This is Drury Lane. This is Mr. Novello. This is theatre. Anyone who continues to announce the demise of melodrama because the film can do its stuff is belied eight times weekly at the Lane.

So, too, at the Prince's, where Mr. Ian Hay's "The Gusher" with Mr. Alistair Sim replaced "The Frog" with Mr. Gordon Harker. The other ingredients—thrills, crime, travel, and comedy—were the same as usual. Again the mystery arises. Is not this drama with its sinking ships and scenes of savage life knocked sideways by the meanest effort of Elstree? The answer, delivered at the box-office, is

quite simply "No."

Mr. Harker carried his fine Cockney accent and grand, prognathous comic mask to the Haymarket where "The Phantom Light," by Miss Evadne Price, offered to the enormous legion of Harkerites fun and fury in a Cornish light-house with their incomparable hero standing firm amid the rage of wreckers' and the smugglers' dreadful stratagem. A severe taste might require that such a piece be labelled "For Non-Adults Only." Well, London and its visitors include a great many elderly Non-Adults.

At the Lyceum there was a touch of psychology unusual to melodrama in "Wanted for Murder," a study of a sexual and homicidal degenerate whose dominant motive was a mad vanity and desire to make the police look silly once again. Mr. Terence de Marney as the horrid youth had Mr. Arthur Sinclair's assistance as an Irish inhabitant of Scotland Yard. Mr. de Marney was livid and loathsome in a life-like way and Mr. Sinclair terse and comic in a way very much his own. A certain amount had been done to build up this piece with spectacle to suit a big theatre, but it remained the most intelligent, realistic, and psychologically plausible of the autumn's four dramas.

Mr. Sinclair came over to the Lyceum from the Haymarket where he had been repeating his magnificent but now too heavily elaborated picture of the swaggering Captain in "Juno and the Paycock." The amount of life in this grand piece was proved by the fact that the revival could be moved to the Saville without Mr. Sinclair and continue to run.

The autumn crop of new plays, real plays,

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

that is, and not vehicles for thrills and guffaws, began splendidly with Mr. Priestley's "Time and the Conways" at the Duchess. Here at last was something to which an intelligent playgoer could take his intelligence and yet enjoy the appropriate pleasures of the play. For, while the piece invites consideration of Mr. Dunne's experiments with Time, it does not enforce such an intellectual exercise nor does it, with a lofty metaphysical address, bully those who are content with the ordinary clock and calendar to regard them as hopeless deceivers. The play shows an ordinary family in the great liberating moment of 1919 when 'The War to End War' was over and again to-day when the next world-war seems to be just getting into its stride. It offers a rich variety of types, some beautifully co-operative acting by a team with more talent than 'name,' a brilliant second act, and something to take hold of and think about. Some say it is terribly gloomy: but is it? Who in his senses expects all the dreams of twenty to have been realised at forty? The point of the play is the futility of a family's dreams and the nature of its disillusion.

Miss Dodie Smith's "Bonnet over the Windmill," at the New, also introduced several young and promising players. Her story has less bite than Mr. Priestley's: its compensation, for the audience, is the wide spread of its scene, its action, its humour, and its range of feeling. Youth is seen on the threshold of life, love, and the professions: the autumn fire of an old affection burns in a neighbouring hearth. A young actress throws her bonnet over the windmill of a prosperous play-wright in the hope of being wiser as well as happier for an amorous escapade. This episode gives the play its title and also its handicap. The popularity will be derived more, I think, from the humour and vitality of the young careerists sharing attics and roof-tops in Camden Town and for the nice mixture of comedy and sentiment with which Miss Smith has treated the reunion of an august actor-manager and his first and still humble flame. Miss Ivy St. Helier and Mr. Cecil Parker are admirable in those roles.

The Embassy re-opened with "The Day is Gone," by Mr. W. Chetham-Strode, the kind of murder-play that is efficient enough to be likeable. In this Mr. Nicholas Hannen was the gentlest, sweetest murderer that ever drowned one wife in deliberation and

took another in haste. At the 'Old Vic,' whose company had previously provided the very successful Buxton Festival, "Pygmalion," led off with Miss Diana Wynyard in the role of the Flower-Girl and Mr. Robert Morley as the professor of elocution. This certainly was to give first-class honours of acting to one of Mr. Shaw's second-class plays. Second-class that is, by his own standard. In a London packed with comedy-thrillers and spectacular melodramas for non-adults, "Pygmalion" acquires the status of a masterpiece. Comparisons can be flattering as well as odious.

MR. BENJAMIN POLLOCK

Some months ago the toy theatres achieved prominence once more for a little while. Mr. Benjamin Pollock, last of the toy theatre makers, was celebrating his 80th birthday. In August in this, the 60th year of his being in business, Mr. Pollock died, and with his death England has no longer a 'Publisher' of the 'Juvenile Drama.'

Mr. Pollock was the son-in-law of Mr. J. Reddington, who himself had started out in this unique trade in 1838. Their shop was always, and is still, No. 73, Hoxton Street, Hoxton, N., just beyond the City. In a recent number of "Drama" I was able to describe the Exhibition of the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild, arranged as a birthday compliment to Mr. Pollock in November last. In the same issue there was a photograph of Mr. Pollock taken on his birthday.

The toy theatre lives on. Mr. Pollock has provided his own memorial. The scenes and characters are a souvenir of a vanished period in the history of our theatre and times. There is a good representative collection in the library of the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild, of which society Mr. Pollock was a Vice-President, and a number of collectors are members of the same organisation. In the Victoria and Albert Museum there is a toy theatre made by Mr. Pollock, showing a scene from "The Silver Palace."

Mr. Pollock and his theatres have often attracted literary and artistic, as well as social attention. Some years ago, Lord Berners and the Sitwell family made a London ballet for M. Diaghilev, "The Triumph of Neptune," for which the scenery and costumes were copied line for line from Mr. Pollock's favourite productions. Mr. A. E. Wilson has collected much information on the Juvenile Drama in general and published it as "Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured." Abroad there are admirers and collectors; one, Herr Roehler, intends to publish his researches on the paper theatre at home and abroad.

The future of Mr. Pollock's business is uncertain; there are various schemes. Surely it is a matter in which London itself as a city should take personal interest.

GERARD MORICE.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

By Geoffrey Whitworth

MANY people hardly believed the evidence of their eyes when they read in the newspaper one August morning that the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee had at last acquired a site for the National Theatre, thus bringing into the sphere of practical politics a scheme that had seemed to languish to the point of death for over a quarter of a century.

From time to time, however, since its foundation in 1919, members of the British Drama League had been reminded that behind the scenes the work of the Committee was being carried on, and spasmodically at various League Conferences resolutions were passed which piously supported the movement, and urged the Committee on the path of action. But little came of all this talk. The National Theatre still remained a dream—a castle in Spain.

Dramatically now the situation has all at once been changed. The Fabian tactics of the Committee have proved more than justified. By their very delay the funds at the Committee's disposal have more than doubled themselves, and they have been able to purchase a site which, short of Trafalgar Square or Hyde Park Corner, could hardly be bettered.

It is true that criticisms have appeared in the press to the effect that South Kensington is "out of the way," and that no theatre can expect to succeed unless it be situated in the district commonly known as "theatre land." Of an ordinary playhouse this might be true. But the National Theatre will be no ordinary Theatre. To it the normal West End standards do not apply. From some points of view there are even positive advantages in a district which is removed from the congested purlieus of Piccadilly, and where in an atmosphere of comparative peace the art of the theatre may be practised against a quiet and dignified background. Actually, the site is very accessible from all the four points of the compass. Five lines of 'buses will pass the theatre doors. A covered sub-way leads from the west end of the theatre to South Kensington Station, two minutes' walk away, where will be found both tube and underground railways with their trains that run in every direction, and connect with the principal railway systems of the metropolis. Never-

theless, as already pointed out, the theatre itself will remain a little removed from the hurly-burly of a great city. A place of pilgrimage as well as a place of resort.

Those critics, I think, take a more reasonable ground who show some doubt as to the ability of the Committee to create a policy for the theatre which shall justify the expenditure involved, and render it immune from the competition of such a tried and successful venture as the Old Vic in the Waterloo Road. They forget, however, that compared with that of all other theatres, the policy of the National Theatre will be not only different but unique.

In the space of a short article it is impossible to justify such a claim. Readers should study the brochure recently issued by the S.M.N.T. Committee under the title of "The Case for a National Theatre" where they will find a full statement of National Theatre policy and an answer to most of those questions which are rightly asked by an enquiring mind when first faced with the National Theatre project.

Negatively, one may say that contrary to common opinion, the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre will *not* be a Shakespeare Theatre in the ordinary meaning of the term. Founded in the name of Shakespeare, the theatre will for the most part produce either new and original dramas or plays which, though they belong to the contemporary stage, are no longer being played. At present the life of a new successful play is measured in months. Is it right that the earlier comedies of Noel Coward, Somerset Maugham or Barrie are practically unknown to the younger generation of London playgoers? In this respect the audiences of the provincial repertory and amateur theatres are more lucky. But is it right that the performances of the plays we have in mind should be denied to the metropolis? And then, of course, there is the untold wealth of classical drama which is lost to the modern theatre. This vacuum will be filled by the National Theatre.

But its aims are far wider than that. When once firmly established one of its duties will be to provide for the touring of its most successful productions throughout the chief cultural centres in the British Isles. It is a misrepresentation of the facts to say that the

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

National Theatre will cater for London alone. National Theatre Tours have always been central in the Committee's scheme, but to make sure that these tours shall be of the utmost excellence, it is necessary that the home of the company shall be fixed, and that for the greater part of each year its work shall be conducted under stabilised conditions.

I know that there are excellent people, even within the Drama League, who either as a matter of principle, or because they are of a sceptical turn of mind, are luke-warm or adverse to the National Theatre idea. Some fewer still (not members of the League, I think) fear the National Theatre because of vested interests or envious thoughts. But to readers of "Drama" and to members of the League as a whole I appeal quite confidently for that support and good will which is needed if this great project is to be carried through

to completion.

On more than one occasion Conferences of the League, have by large majorities registered their support. At this stage the individual word or thought of help, is needed just as much as more material gifts, and any offers of service in the cause, personal or otherwise, will be gratefully considered. The building of the National Theatre cannot begin till a great deal more money has been subscribed, and when one thinks of the magnitude of the task which lies ahead, one may be excused for feeling a little appalled. But the object in view is also of great magnitude—nothing less than the founding of an institution from which only posterity can reap the full and ultimate benefit. I have no illusions that our object will be wholly fulfilled in the lifetime of many of us. However, having put our hand to the plough we will not look back.

STORY OF THE COTSWOLD PLAYERS

Who this month Celebrate their Silver Jubilee

By Constance Smedley

LIKE many other amateur companies The Cotswold Players "happened" out of events.

The formation of The Cotswold Players was indirectly due to the Mid-Gloster Pageant of Progress, September 2nd-5th and 9th, 1911, at Stroud. The Pageant caused all the villages in some fifty square miles to co-operate in this demonstration and 1,300 performers took part. It was organised in such a way that only one rehearsal of the whole was necessary, and it went without a hitch, playing on three days to 5,000, 7,000 and 9,000 spectators. I worked out the plan with Frank Gwynne Evans, who put it into graceful verse, whilst Maxwell Armfield was responsible for the grouping and colour. Here was drama used for a social revival. During the next two years the costumes (each of which had been purchased and often made, by its wearer) might be seen at local fêtes, whist-drives and balls and the general good-feeling aroused was conspicuous.

The Pageant also revealed the dramatic possibilities of the district and during a sojourn in London I began to write one-act plays with an eye on the village audience.

Several plays in this style were written and tried out by friends in London at our studio: with a company headed by Geoffrey Whitworth, who 'created' Ceccino in "The Woman Tamers." Before the Pageant, however, Geoffrey Whitworth and I had been associated in an amateur company, "The Mummers."

An open-air performance by the "Mummers" of my play "Pierrot's Welcome" and the "Maid, the Box and the Locksmith" by Geoffrey Whitworth and H. Pearl Adam was played by the Authors.

When we returned to the Cotswolds we were approached by Arthur and Mabel Blanch suggesting that a company of young people should be formed to act my plays. The first performances of the Cotswold Players were given in school rooms on stages made from the desks, and tickets were from 3d, (if not 2d. and children half-price).

The scenery was chiefly plain casement cloth curtains and a little later the introduction of hessian was such a novelty as to provoke considerable opposition. Appliqué embroidery was used instead of paint as our lighting was primitive, candles or lamps as



THE NATIONAL THEATRE SITE, CROMWELL GARDENS, SOUTH KENSINGTON.

The main block of buildings shown in the print will be demolished. The garden in front will remain. To the right is seen the corner of the Victoria and Albert Museum, with the towers of the Natural History Museum beyond. The street to the left leads to South Kensington Station, two minutes walk away.



MISS PAMELA STANLEY IN "VICTORIA REGINA" BY LAURENCE HOUSMAN. PRODUCED BY NORMAN MARSHALL, LYRIC THEATRE, LONDON, 1937. FROM THE DRAWING BY VERONICA HAIGH.

STORY OF THE COTSWOLD PLAYERS

likely as not. We very soon found out that these simple methods often gave a lovelier effect than the elaborate electrical devices of sophisticated times, and everything was designed to make the utmost use of what we had at our disposal.

"Pierrot's Welcome" one of our first efforts, a reversal of the sport of wife-beating prevalent in benighted hamlets, was always enormously popular. Pierrot in white in the moonlight arriving at Pierrette's house—a narrow house on account of stage—a threefold screen with an ingenious slanting roof effect—finds the red window blind drawn close but the candle lit—the square of crimson most effective against the pale embroidered snowy landscape. No moonlight I have seen was quite so lovely as that produced by two lamps in the wings provided with shields of blue tissue paper.

Later we did Drinkwater's "Cophetua" and we were the first outside his home-town to do it. He came down to take a final rehearsal. Our first experiment in speech notation was made here by getting the words spoken on definite notes so that the result was merely vocal and no one could then tell the sex of the players which varied in proportion from time to time. The flowing wool beards over their Byzantine robes and slow gestures of extreme age made an effective mask.

This was our first use of heavy rug-wool for hair and beards—Subsequently John Drinkwater told us that this was the 'latest thing' in Paris Experimental theatres. These wigs were certainly more effective than 'real' hair though I never yet met an actor who would wear one if he (or especially 'she') could avoid it.

We were early convinced of the fact that rhythm was the one essential in capturing an audience; by producing poetry as well as folk songs (Cecil Sharp's versions) on a definitely rhythmic basis, we proved our point. We also found Captain Whall's "Sea Shanties" of great value.

The Cotswold Players are unique in several features, the first being that they are probably the first company of players who adopted a distinctive uniform for men and women alike, capable of being slipped over stage costume or ordinary attire, and thus enabling all members to take tickets, act as Usher at a moment's notice and slip behind the scenes ready to play; or shift the scenery, attend to the lights and curtains, without hurt to stage attire.

The costume consisted of a coat in the fashion of a mediæval doctor's robe to the ankles with a broad wristband and stout outside pocket capable of holding nails, wire, tickets, programmes or any other useful aids to a performance.

When giving a show for the first time at Dursley, the audience was by no means streaming in and the players in their uniforms marched through the town, exciting the population to action themselves with the consequence of a good house. Who these strange beings were, men or women, was another good arresting feature, and solved by small boys who accompanied the processions on hands and knees, shouting out which was male or female by examining their shoes.

The bright colours, scarlet and lavender, served another valuable end of brightening the schoolrooms or parish halls in which the performances were being given, in the familiar surroundings where the village had been educated. A note of fantasy, gaiety and surprise was struck at once. The friendliness of the players, moving amongst the startled villagers, made a link between audience and stage. When the players stepped upon the platform to sing and dance between the three plays of which the bill invariably consisted, the atmosphere was already warmed. Folk-songs in action were a feature of the show, and a couple of original folks songs were added as the Cotswold Players became part of their home-town life.

Cotswold Players all are we,
Eager to amuse you,
Pray you share our jollity,
As we trip it merrily;
Nothing we'll refuse you,
Would you have us serious or gay, Sirs?
Glad we are you've come to see
The Cotswold Players.

Cotswold Players here you see,
Gloster lads and maidens,
Lightpill, Burleigh, Amberley,
Nailsworth, and from Stroud are we,
Redborough has strayed in
Stonehouse, Ebley, each will you obey, sirs,
Like a well-trained army, we the Cotswold Players.

'Landlubbers few stories know,
For travelling I've a notion.
'Shakespeare stayed in England,' No!
Italian was Romeo!
We will cross the ocean.
Though at home we much prefer to stay, sirs,
Shakespeare went abroad, also
The Cotswold Players.

STORY OF THE COTSWOLD PLAYERS

This journeying to the villages and hamlets was on cycles, with the aid of a cart on which the fit-up reposed, designed by Arthur Blanch, then a student of Wycliffe College.

It must be understood the players though indigenous to the district did not spring from it. They were well educated and alive to communal responsibilities, and keen on taking ideas of progress into the outlying hamlets. Buses, motors and wireless were unknown.

The Cotswold Players were a pioneer effort in the amateur world and their aim stretched beyond the desire for self-expression and the applause of their friends—it rose even higher than the laudable desire to do good work and bring worthwhile dramatic fare to their community. By invitation of the Governor of Gloucester Gaol they gave the first production ever given in a Gaol, performing "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." A travelling company to perform the functions of the Arts League of Service in their own Community, may exist beside the most ambitious efforts, of the more experienced players and form an excellent training and recruiting ground.

The desire for more ambitious work was making itself felt in 1913, and I wrote "The Fortunate Shepherds" for a narrow platform stage or out of doors performance, embodying Cotswold traditions and customs, spiced with the most up-to-date possible psychology and social relations. This was not produced on account of the war.

But a little later we moved to London to carry further the new technique under the name of the Greenleaf Theatre, but before leaving we left the Company on a democratic basis with a constitution. At this juncture Mr. Hannan Clarke joined the company. He was of the naturalistic school and the Players continued under his leadership producing plays for war charities.

Later on my husband and I were in America preaching the more advanced theories of dramatic art in Universities and Colleges, culminating on Broadway.

In the meantime Geoffrey Whitworth was founding, in 1919, the British Drama League, with the Merstham Players (whose first production took place in a Surrey Chalkpit) as its first unit. It may not be too much to say that his earlier contact with the work of the Cotswold Players had sewed the first seeds of his

vision of bringing beauty to the people by means of the Drama.

On our return from America in 1923, the Cotswold Players arranged a Greenleaf Theatre Summer School at Woodchester. Here we discovered a genuine "find" in Mr. Daniel Roberts of Gloucester, who took to Greenleaf and Vieux Columbier rhythmic technique like the latest aeroplane.

Thanks to T. Hannan Clarke's able leadership and Daniel Roberts' production the Players progress has continued with Stroud as their headquarters, a permanent rehearsal and storage room, and a long list of plays.

The Celebration Jubilee Dinner which is to take place in October, will be followed by a Jubilee week of performances at Stroud when "Loyalties" by Galsworthy will be performed and a light play by all the present company.

The pitfalls for the Cotswold Players are a tendency to rest upon past successes, with a conflicting tendency to break away into a path trod by the many, instead of continuing to be a standard bearer of progress, which means continuing to pioneer.

The purpose of the Cotswold Players was threefold:

1. To produce plays containing the seeds of progress, spiritual, cultural and moral.
2. To form a centre of fellowship and good craftsmanship in Stroud.
3. To develop a permanent centre, and rehearsal and storage room, to radiate influence by carrying out plays to the surrounding villages.

Summing up the lessons the history of these Players teaches, I should say that stability and continuance in progress come from adherence to the original purposes for which the Society was founded.

Beginning in a small way on a sound basis, the Cotswold Players have continued to advance. They have maintained friendly relations with each other, the producer and the founders for 25 years.

"Rich Martha" a comedy, by Bertha N. Graham, which was awarded the first prize by the Sheffield Playgoers' Club under the adjudication of the Drama League some seasons ago, will be given a fortnight's run from Monday, October 4th, at 8.30 p.m., by Lionel Westlake on behalf of the Inaugurated Plays Ltd., and by arrangement with the 1930 Players, at the Grafton Theatre, Tottenham Court Road. The production is by Hector Abbas, and the cast includes Eric Maturin, Charles Windermere and Joan Playfair.

THE FRENCH AMATEUR MOVEMENT

By Philip Lorraine

THE thirtieth anniversary of the Association of French-Speaking Amateur Dramatic Societies—the *Confédération Internationale des Sociétés Théâtrales d'Amateurs* (C.I.S.T.A.)—was celebrated at a week-end conference in Paris during July. Delegates from France, Belgium, and Switzerland were present, and the mornings were devoted to meetings, the afternoons and evenings to performances given by twelve of the best constituent societies. The proceedings concluded on the Sunday with a ceremonial dinner, at which many prominent members of the French theatrical world were present.

Founded in 1907 with only nine societies, the C.I.S.T.A. now contains over five hundred, and its great success is largely due to the inspiring genius of M. Claude Roland, the dramatist, who has been President for the last twenty years. Some of the objects of the association are to inspire a taste for French literature by means of the drama, to supply some kind of permanent theatre where it does not already exist, and to provide the workers in industrial and rural areas with a healthy and pleasant recreation. According to the reports of the delegates, these objects seem to have been remarkably well achieved. Examples were cited of amateur dramatic societies flourishing in districts which have recently been the scene of violent industrial disputes, and of Patois actors whose vigorous playing held spellbound audiences to whom the words were entirely incomprehensible.

This growing interest in drama was being reflected in the increase in attendance at the professional theatre, and every amateur was now regarded as part of a potential audience. The movement had, so far, not received any official government recognition, but it was hoped that this will soon be remedied. The C.I.S.T.A. also acts as an advisory and co-ordinating body, and organises the annual competitions in which every society takes part. For this the societies are arranged in divisions—first, second, third, according to their ability—and promotion from one division to the other is the result of success in the competitions. This grading ensures that the in-

experienced teams do not have to compete against overwhelming odds, and furious efforts are made to qualify for promotion. The judging is performed voluntarily by a jury of eminent actors, actresses, and dramatists, and medals are awarded to the first three teams in each division.

Among the topics discussed at the conference were questions dealing with the remission of entertainment tax; the discrepancies in royalties arising from the fluctuations of the franc and the representations made in that connection by the C.I.S.T.A. to the Society of Authors; and how far the broadcasting of amateur performances affected the non-employment of professionals on the wireless.

The programme of plays performed was well varied, and there were good examples of modern French farce, tragedy, comedy, and fantasy. Most of the plays were one-act or extracts from longer plays, and all were by modern authors. The standard of acting was quite high, and the performances were particularly noticeable for their good production and excellent use of the unit set. Slowness in taking up cues and bad timing, which so often characterize amateur acting were conspicuously absent, and the ease and confidence with which these actors walked the stage, made it difficult to believe that they were only amateurs. There was a maturity of manner and a natural eloquence of gesture which gave their acting a decided finish.

The best performances came from Les Comédiens Brestois who held the audience with some fine intense acting in the second act of "La vie de Salaun" a mediaeval tragedy by M. Malmanche; and a society from Geneva, who admirably expressed the psychological conflict of the second act of "Décalage," a modern society drama by Denys Amiel. "Le Sonnet D'Arvers" that delightful one-act play by Jean-Jacques Bernard was a little too delicate a theme for the Parisian Society, La Flûte de Pan, but "Feu La mère de Madame" a very popular farce by Georges Feydeau, gave a Swiss club an excellent opportunity to display its virtuosity.



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THE new volume of "Drama" which commences with the present number coincides with the beginning of an Autumn season which bids fair to prove a very busy one for the Theatre and for the Drama League. Developments in regard to the National Theatre are dealt with on another page. Here we would remind our readers of the Annual Conference, which is to be held this year at Cardiff under the auspices of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Festival Committee. Members of the League will have received the full programme of the Conference, and we look forward to a large attendance. It is the League's first visit to Wales. That it in itself should be a powerful attraction, and the Conference Agenda includes some very interesting and controversial items. Members of the League are also reminded that for the first time this year the Annual General Meeting of the League will follow the Conference instead of being held, as formerly, at the end of June.

During August and September a series of important drama festivals have been held on the Continent. Salzburg has attracted ever increasing crowds, and, as a wit has said, the streets were filled by Austrians trying to look like Americans and Americans trying to look like Austrians. In Moscow, too, the annual drama festival was successfully held, and Sir Barry Jackson, who was the leader of the Drama League Party to the Festival, has just returned full of interesting views as to the state of the modern Russian theatre. At Cardiff Sir Barry may have something to say about his experiences, and it is hoped that he will be able to deliver a lecture in London on the same subject for the benefit of our members.

Entries for the "News-Chronicle" Three-Act Play Competition have been satisfactory, over two hundred Societies having decided to submit their production of Mr. Priestley's play "Mystery at Greenfingers" for judgment by the critics appointed by the Drama League. Of these entries it may interest our readers to know, over 70% are Societies affiliated to the League. The contest was, of course, widely advertised in the pages of the "News Chronicle" which is a national newspaper circulating throughout the kingdom. The proportion of Drama League entries fully justifies the League's claim to represent the bulk of serious amateur dramatic societies in this country.

MS. play competitions are increasing in public favour, and the International One-Act Play Theatre announces its Fourth Annual Competition, to be judged this year by Miss Flora Robson, Mr. Tyrone Guthrie, Mr. J. B. Priestley and Miss Everard, the director of the Theatre. Miss Everard reminds us that previous competitions have started many young writers on a successful career, and that a London professional production, besides a cash prize, is awarded to the winners. Plays must be sent in by November 30th, and the rules of the competition may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, International One-Act Play Theatre, 9, Wardour Street, London, W.1.

A series of six Evening Practice Classes in Production and Acting will be held this autumn at 9, Fitzroy Square on Wednesday nights, beginning on November 3rd. As numbers will be limited, early application is urged. Further particulars may be had from the Schools' Organizer.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"My Life in the Russian Theatre." By Nemirovitch-Dantchenko. Geoffrey Bles. 18s.

"The Seven Soviet Arts." By Kurt London. Faber & Faber. 15s.

"Historic Costume." By Lucy Barton. A. & C. Black. 21s.

"Curtains for Stage Settings." By Frank Napier. Muller. 5s.

"Christmas Plays." Edited by John Hampden. Nelson. 2s. 6d.

"The One-Act Theatre." Six New Plays by James Parish. French. 2s. 6d.

"The Two Ways." By A. L. E. Williams. The S.P.C.K. 1s.

"This Tennis Racket." By Vernon Woodhouse and Harold Simpson; "He Found Adventurer." By Charles Barkaway. Play Rights and Publications. 2s. each.

"After-Glow," by H. F. Rubinstein; "Dirge Without Dole," by Cedrick Mount; "Shells," by L. du Garde Peach. Play Rights and Publications. 1s. each.

"The Five-Pound Piece," by Bernard Merivale; "Pot-Bound," by Lilian Smee; "The Lamp," by Ken Etheridge. Deane & Sons. 1s. each.

"The Lake of Wonder." By Hugh Stewart. Muller. 1s.

"Beginnings in Drama." By E. Martin Browne. Deane & Sons. 1s.

VLADIMIR NEMIROVITCH-DANTCHENKO, who with Constantin Stanislavsky founded the Moscow Art Theatre, was told by Mr. Oliver M. Saylor that he must write his memoirs. It is our good fortune that he agreed to do so, although at times—owing to an unusual modesty which gives his book "My Life in the Russian Theatre" a particularly gracious flavour—he found the task difficult. However, M. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko must be used to difficult tasks. But no matter how great the difficulty, the building up of one of the most wonderful of theatrical institutions was achieved and is here described, from the meeting with Stanislavsky (resulting in an 18 hour conversation) to the triumphal first tour abroad. It is a refreshing book to read; devoid of conceit, political animosity, jealousy or rancour; indeed, owing to the author's generous outlook, we get the impression that, in the theatre, given genius and enthusiasm, success is assured. Of course, much more than this is required, and the author's gift for organisation, his tact, sense of psychology, and sympathy, have obviously played a larger part in the creation of the Art Theatre than has been realised up to now. A great deal of the book is given up to a detailed portrait of Chekhov; there are also chapters on Gorki, and at the end there is a rather terrifying glimpse of Tolstoy. Pictures of Moscow life, both before and during the revolutions, abound, and the author's selfless devotion to genius wherever found is well shown in the telegram—"I am happier than ever I was at productions of my own plays"—sent to Chekhov after the success of "The Sea Gull." The work of the Moscow Art Theatre has won the admiration of the world; on reading this book affection for its history and methods will be added to the admiration.

In "The Seven Soviet Arts," Dr. Kurt London, to quote his own words, pilots his readers "as it were in an airship, over the intellectual landscape of the U.S.S.R." While a wholehearted supporter of the Russian experiment in general, he sees no reason to indulge in the usual half-stupified paen of admiration. Instead, he paints a depressing picture of bigotry, suppression and misunderstanding on the part of the Stalin government with regard to developments in art, which should be carefully read by all young people who cherish firmly the belief that if they could only get to Russia, appreciation and fame would at once be theirs. This belief is mainly based on earlier stages of the revolution when experiment, especially in the theatre, was undoubtedly encouraged. But now, with Tairov dismissed, Meyerhold obliged to walk carefully, and the cult of "socialistic realism" laying a heavy hand on all innovations, the Russian theatre would appear to be changing. The other arts are, if anything, still more fettered; the artist is certainly well looked after provided he walks strictly in the right path, but there is a painful account of a "disputation" to which the unhappy painter, Nikritin, is subjected because he produced a picture which to the Western eye seems a very mild piece of symbolism. As with all other visitors to Russia, the care and treatment of the young arouses Dr. London's warmest approbation and it is in these happy, healthy children that he sees the hope of a more enlightened future. Meanwhile, all those who hold that perfection in art and in life are only to be found in the U.S.S.R. would do well to study this remarkably sane and convincing book.

Books on costume tend to grow larger and larger, and Miss Lucy Barton's "Historic Costume for the Stage" would be somewhat alarming in appearance and comprehensiveness were it not for the racy and attractive style in which it is written. Miss Barton (and also Mr. Iden Payne, who contributes a foreword) believes strongly in historical accuracy, and during the progress of costume from Egypt to the "New Century," the detail accumulated is amazing. Each chapter has its short history of the period, followed by a description of the general characteristics of the costumes and their accessories, and the setting which formed their background, and then valuable advice is given on practical reproduction and cutting out. No problem is shelved, but the authoress is right in stating that men's costumes from the 17th century onwards are usually better hired. There are many spirited and agreeable illustrations, but they are sometimes too small to be of practical value; this is unfortunate considering the general size of the book. Of necessity, this is rather an expensive volume, but Wardrobe Mistresses should insist on having it presented to them by a grateful Committee as soon as possible.

As we all know, curtains on the stage have a knack of promising more than they perform, and are frequently very intractable affairs. Mr. Frank Napier, in his "Curtains for Stage Settings," tries hard to make the various problems involved simple, and begs that nothing he advises be accepted unthinkingly. Nevertheless, the technical difficulties of hanging and manipulating a set of curtains can be considerable; the problem of

RECENT BOOKS

borders is well-nigh insoluble; and exterior scenes are hardly ever successful. (But better forego all attempt at an exterior than indulge in anything resembling the horrible "wood scene" shown in Figure 31.) Mr. Napier not only gives detailed advice on curtains, but on all that ever went with curtains—doors, windows, fireplaces, ground-rows; and groups who indulge in "scenery" will find the chapters on "Built Pieces" and "Masking In" valuable. Altogether, it is a useful book, and it is scarcely Mr. Napier's fault if it lacks the gay lucidity of his masterpiece, "Noises Off."

An addition to Messrs. Nelson's "Little Theatre" series is a collection of "Christmas Plays" edited by Mr. John Hampden. Some are for very young children, others for older players, and, naturally, all, except Mr. Bourne's little circus play, "Crack o' the Whip" (which would be delightful for any season), have the requisite Christmas outlook. The two Nativity plays and the mime will, no doubt, be found useful for some occasions, but the most outstanding contribution is Miss Rosalind Vallance's "Pan's Christmas"—virtually a diminutive opera. This may not be everyone's idea of a Christmas play, but it is undoubtedly striking. The book ends with a "burlesque revue" by Mr. Rodney Bennett, at the close of which the audience is requested to shout "yes," if they have enjoyed it. In our case, we feel this would be asking rather too much after such a dose of exhausting humour.

The tenth book of "The One-Act Theatre" series contains six new plays by Mr. James Parish. They are better written than the usual one-act play, but are not always so sincere. Among the more attractive are, "Postscript to Adventure" (although events move with incredible rapidity at the end), "Listen to the Band," a mordant study of post-war reactions, and the last, "The Exiles," a curiously touching sketch of two English spinsters, living abroad. The least suitable for the average amateur is "Over and Over Again," an example of the sophistication which dogs Mr. Parish's footsteps.

"The Two Ways" is a missionary play by the Rev. A. L. E. Williamson, Vicar of Banbury. It is an interesting example of a drama specially designed for community work; a large number of people are required (a cast of thirty is the minimum number), and the six episodes—which begin immediately after the Ascension—include a vivid glimpse of the beginning of the Crusades, a scene showing the horror of the Inquisition, and, as a finale, a meeting at the Jerusalem Conference of 1928 of various nationalities. For parochial work it should be excellent, especially as there are opportunities for striking character studies among the many parts.

The two other full-length plays in this month's list are very different. Perhaps the most interesting thing about "This Tennis Racket," by Mr. Vernon Woodhouse and Mr. Harold Simpson, is that it was played at the Shilling Theatre by a good company. They must have had some difficulty in giving conviction to an entertainment which not even a final bedroom scene, with everyone shrieking at each other, can redeem from a sense of futility. "He Found Adventure" is a rousing sea-scout play for boys. The author, Mr. Charles Barkaway, tells us that the first production was a happy one. We can believe it. Our only regret is that the villains got off so lightly, but doubtless this makes for a concluding burst of hilarity.

There are seven one-act plays. Mr. Harold Rubinstein's thoughtful "After-Glow" shows Shakes-

peare and his dark lady—now both middle-aged—meeting in the churchyard of St. Saviour's Southwark. The adjacent Globe Theatre catches fire, and believing that two hundred people are being burnt alive, they avert their eyes with some difficulty—but go on talking. However, in the end, all turns out fairly well. Mr. Cedrick Mount in "Dirge Without Dole" adopts, to some extent, the same methods used in his well known "Twentieth Century Lullaby," but the Adjudicator is a new touch, and the echo of the motif at the close makes an effective ending. "Shells" by Dr. du Garde Peach is a vivid little play, taking place in a front line trench. It is well worth any trouble the various "noises off" may cause, and, acted competently, should give an audience something to remember. "The Five-Pound Piece," by Mr. Bernard Merivale is a pleasant comedy for women in which four pots of hyacinths form an excellent excuse for the display of amusing, but not very strong, characterisation. "Pot-Bound" by Miss Lilian Smee shows the bravery of Annie Taylor struggling against intolerable conditions, and the tragic plight of the newly married Betty, facing these conditions for the first time. It is one more example of the fact that these depressing studies of slum misery are usually successful. Equally sombre but more in the nature of a modern morality is "The Lamp" by Mr. Ken Etheridge. The entombed miner, Owain Davies, a wastrel, is visited when dying by his better self and various people he has befriended; its mystical element is well handled. Mr. Hugh Stewart's "The Lake of Wonder," has much beauty and poetry bound up with its simple realism, and, although it leaves some problems unsolved, it is unusual and much above the average "cottage" play.

In his little treatise "Beginnings in Drama," Mr. E. Martin Browne has so admirably condensed the history, theory and practice of the theatre that, if possible, the founders of any new group would be well advised to present each member with a copy before actual work begins.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DEAR SIR,

Could any of your readers give me information on Barrett known as Baron or the Baron-Nathan who was director of the entertainments at Rosherville Gardens, Gravesend. He died at Kennington, London, 1856, at the age of 63. There are many extracts in the old editions of Punch and even one as late as July 1, 1936. I also seek information on his wife and sister-in-law, the Misses Buckley of Bristol, who were dancers on the stage.

Incidentally I am writing the life of his brother, Isaac Nathan, the composer (1790-1864).

Should be obliged if you would let me know if you are inserting this letter in "Drama."

Yours faithfully,

OLGA SOMEIL PHILLIPS,
(Biographer to Solomon J. Solomon.)

4, Perceval Avenue, Hampstead, N.W.3.

THE TIMING OF "NOISES-OFF"

By Seaward Beddow

OFF-STAGE noises and other effects worked from "behind" are demanded by a large percentage of plays and their proper timing deserves more attention than it sometimes seems to get in amateur performances. Hence these notes, because a badly timed effect may spoil a play.

The trouble generally arises through asking too much of the effectsman. He is often called upon not only to work the effect properly but also to judge for himself at what moment it is due, perhaps by following a copy of the script of the play or merely by listening for words which are to be his cue. But if something happens to go wrong with the word-cue, what then? And remember he is seldom placed so that he has the advantage of a clear view of the stage to help him at such a critical moment. He must guess and hope for the best; who can be surprised if under such circumstances he is guilty of some mistiming?

As the work of the effects-man is trying enough in any event, he should be relieved of the dangerous responsibility of having to judge for himself the moment when his effect is due. This can be done by providing him with a light-cue controlled by the prompter. He will then have nothing to do but obey mechanically the lamp-signals he receives. In good time before each effect, he is warned to "stand by" in readiness, and at the exact moment of the effect he is given the signal to "go."

The necessary apparatus is quite simple. A small switchboard is fitted with some half dozen small switches and one or two pushes is made and placed within easy reach of the prompter's hand. The prompt book is clearly marked on the margin of the page to show where each effect comes in, and about a page, or perhaps a little less, before the effect is due a warning is marked. For instance, if a siren is to be heard "off" (as e.g., in the play "R.U.R.") the marginal marks will be "Warn Siren" and "Siren." When the "Warn Siren" is reached, the prompter turns on a switch which lights a small lamp placed near the effectsman. It is his signal to "stand by." When "Siren" is reached, the prompter switches off the lamp and the effectsman instantly sounds the siren. Nothing is left

to guesswork. It is merely mechanical obedience to a clear signal. If the effect is a continuous one such as the tolling of a bell which must be stopped at a given moment, the prompter, following a marginal note, "Stop Bell," presses a push connected to a red lamp. The effectsman, seeing this lamp, stops the effect. By this means complete control by the prompter is secured for every effect, and always the prompter has plainly written instructions for his guidance.

The system of light-cues just described can of course have a wider application than that of controlling noises "off." For instance, it can be used for timing accurately the movement of curtains whether front, side, or traverse; or it will time exactly the entrance of characters who are required to come through a distant door to make their way through the auditorium to the stage, a signal-lamp under control of the prompter having been placed outside the door; or with a play in a Church, it may be employed to signal an organist seated at a distant organ, the lamp being fixed to the organ case.

To return to stage-effects, there is no need to have a separate signal-lamp for each effect if the operator is provided with a written list of his effects in the order in which they come. When using several signal-lamps placed near to one another or when it is necessary to employ several effects-men, it is advisable to colour the various lamps differently so as to distinguish them clearly. This can readily be done with coloured tissue paper tied round the bulb. In my own installation, which has worked satisfactorily for years, the lamps are flashlight bulbs (Osram, 3d.) the wiring is ordinary electric-bell wire; the battery is an "Ever-Ready" with screw terminals (1/3); the switches and pushes are small ones (6d. each), and each is labelled by means of a written card affixed to the switchboard by a drawing pin.

Such a system of light-cues is well worth the trouble entailed in making and fitting up the apparatus, and once made it is ready for use in any play. It could be elaborated and improved, if thought necessary, by having two lamps in each circuit, one at the effectsman's position and the other at the prompt corner, so that the lamps burn together or

THE TIMING OF "NOISES-OFF"

not at all. A failure of the prompter's lamp would show a breakdown in the system and steps might then be taken to substitute an impromptu method of signalling. If the red twin lamps are connected to two-way switches, one at each end of the circuit, the effectsman will be able to answer a "stand-by" signal sent on the red, by turning off the lights to indicate that he is at his post. If he makes no answer investigation will be in order, but if he replies the prompter knows that it is safe to send the "warning" and "go" by putting on the red again and then the white.

The system most in favour on the professional stage is as follows. There are two circuits between the prompt corner and the position occupied by the effectsman. Each of the circuits is supplied with a pair of lamps to burn simultaneously, one at each end. The two lamps of one circuit are red, the other

two are white. First the "stand by" is sent on the red lamps, and if the effectsman replies by turning them out, the red is presently turned on again to signal "warning," and a little while afterwards, at the exact moment for the effect, the white is switched on for "go." And if the effect should need a cue to stop it, the white is left on and then switched off for "stop." An ideal arrangement, particularly if one is so fortunate as to have a permanent stage where the whole thing can be fitted up to stay.

However, taking account of the usual limiting conditions of an amateur performance, I have no hesitation in commending as very useful the simpler system first described. And having had considerable experience in using it I am able to say that it has always proved highly satisfactory in practice.

SUMMER DRAMA SCHOOLS

The Drama School movement is growing and is already having a great and salutary effect on the standard of amateur production. The British Drama League, which initiated this movement, held two highly successful Schools in August and September at Buxton and Eastbourne, both organised, as usual, by Miss Frances Mackenzie. The Schools were well attended, and in each case, besides the ordinary staff instruction in which Miss Kelly and other expert teachers took part, lectures were delivered on more general subjects. We here print short accounts of some of these lectures in the belief that they will interest a wider public than was able to attend the Schools.

EASTBOURNE

LORD BESSBOROUGH, in opening the school, said his task was made all the more interesting through the presence of Monsieur Saint-Denis, who was one of the great giants of the Theatre, and whose work in Paris was known in every country of the world. They were delighted to think that he was now established in London and already doing a most remarkable work for the theatre. He was delighted to express the gratitude of the Drama League to Monsieur Saint-Denis for all his work.

Mr. Whitworth had mentioned his (the speaker's) work in the Dominion of Canada. The Drama Festival there was only born five years ago, and was still young and inexperienced, but Monsieur Saint-Denis went out to Ottawa last April to adjudicate at the

Festival, and was an inspiration to those people in the country who were so enthusiastic about community drama.

Speaking personally, Lord Bessborough supposed that his interest was inherited from his two great-uncles who were among the pioneers of modern amateur drama and founders of the famous "Old Stagers," and the Cambridge A.D.C.

At that time they endeavoured to mix cricket with acting. They played cricket during the day and acted in the evening, but which was the better he was not quite sure. The Old Stagers Company was founded 92 years ago, followed by the Amateur Dramatic Club at Cambridge, and these two amateur societies were the best known in this country; not necessarily because they were the best but because they had been so long established. Those who had studied the trend of amateur drama knew of the enormous change that had taken place since the earlier days.

The words "amateur theatricals" seemed to have been rather uncomplimentary with the word "amateur" taken to refer to ability rather than status, and the movement was rather connected with "Garrison Theatricals" as having the same sort of meaning. It was perhaps quite correct with regard to some amateur societies where it was not possible



AN OUT-DOOR REHEARSAL AT THE B.D.L.
SUMMER SCHOOL AT EASTBOURNE, 1937.
Miss Frances Mackenzie demonstrates
a pose.



BASQUE DANCERS IN THE OPEN-AIR
FESTIVAL AT CAUTERETS, FRANCE.
SEPTEMBER, 1937.

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to say who was amused—the people who took part or the people who looked on.

Now, fortunately, the Amateur Drama movement in the English speaking world was a very different thing, helped and encouraged by the Drama League itself. It was essentially a democratic movement and amateur in the proper sense in that it was done for the love of the thing.

It was natural that democratic peoples should desire self-expression, and drama was one of the arts to which every attention should be given. It was of real benefit that the people should be proficient in the practice of some art, and that was why drama schools had become so popular.

Speaking of the future developments, Lord Bessborough said that with increasing hours of leisure in the hands of the people they should press hard for the furtherance of community drama as a real cultural influence in the national life. One great advantage of the drama was that it enabled people to speak intelligently in the King's English.

It was a fascinating study because community drama meant, not just acting, but great knowledge and study of essential customs, stagecraft, furniture production, lighting and a host of other things.

He honestly believed that the amateur theatre lent a little colour to life, in a world which became more and more mechanical and more and more standardised as the years went by.

LECTURE BY M. SAINT-DENIS

The real work of the Eastbourne School began with a lecture, extending to two parts, by a gentleman famous in the dramatic worlds of both Paris and London, Monsieur Saint-Denis, who addressed large audiences on the evenings of Sunday and Monday about the art of acting. M. Saint-Denis explained the difficulty facing him in trying to cover so huge a subject, and one so controversial, in a couple of talks of an hour each. He speaks excellent English, and is especially to be congratulated on the finding of expressive words to convey the nice shades of meaning arising from his complex subject. There was the world as we know it; there was the imaginative world of the theatre—a mirror held up to Nature, yet not a literal portrait or transcript by any means. There was the art of the dramatist, who, unlike the

novelist, could not utilise descriptive clauses—much had to be left to the readers' (and the actors') powers of discrimination. "And so, naturally," said M. Saint-Denis, "the heaven of acting cannot apply to the hell of human life!"—an aphorism which was received with delighted applause.

With great skill, M. Saint-Denis proceeded to disentangle the problem which confronts the actor at the start, the problem as to how far he is to lose himself in the part, and how far he is to retain his logical conceptions and personal feelings. The difficulty is age-old and insoluble, he said. "I go on the stage only to escape myself," a famous actor had said. The text must be taken, and an effort made to understand it—and not only the actual text, but the drama as imagined by the dramatist. Coming to a concrete example, M. Saint-Denis offered a close analysis of certain scenes in "The Maid's Tragedy" of Beaumont and Fletcher, in which it is necessary to feel the very atmosphere of the scene in terms of a situation arising in the imagination of a dramatist who was writing in blank verse three centuries ago. Another interesting instance was one drawn by the lecturer from the St. James's Park scene in Congreve's "Way of the World," in which the apparently artificial diction became naturally fitting to the artificiality of the scene and plot, to the dress and mode.

THE BISHOP OF CHICHESTER ON RELIGIOUS DRAMA

The Bishop of Chichester (Dr. Bell) gave a very instructive lecture on "Religious Drama" on Wednesday.

The Bishop was introduced by Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, who said they revered him as the man who had done more than any other to link the Church with the stage.

Dr. Bell said the subject of religious drama was of great importance. He traced its history from the 10th century and said that in the 14th and 15th centuries Protestants attacked it partly because of its abuse. In the 16th century came the morality plays. These were opposed by the Puritans and the theatres were closed in 1642. From the beginning of this century a new revival had sprung up, and among the people who had helped were William Powell, Ben Greet and Nugent Monk. The function of the Church, he said,

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was to call men to worship God, and he held that religious drama gave the community the opportunity of co-operating in an act of worship.

One of the most striking things in regard to religious drama was that more and more people were willing to help, but it would be fatal to attempt to commercialise it.

BUXTON.

THE Buxton School was opened by Miss Lilian Baylis, who recalled that she attended the first meeting of the British Drama League, and had only one thing against the Founder, that he "stole" her secretary. Those who started this movement were keen and worked with all their hearts, she declared. "So the League has prospered, and I think it is one of the greatest helps to what we all love so much—good drama."

DR. PEACH

Dr. H. du Garde Peach also spoke at the opening meeting. In the course of his address he said:

"We have about 160 village drama groups in this county, we also have a whole group of playwrights of our own, and we are building up a library of Derbyshire plays. The most recent thing we have done is to put 'on the road' a drama adviser to go round and see our village groups.

"I hope you will all be pioneers, and get hold of new stuff. You are doing a real job of drama if you are producing a new play and letting the author see something better worked out on the stage than he has worked out in his mind. That is much better than slavishly copying easy shows that other people have done, or putting on your stage something that would look much better elsewhere."

MR. TYRONE GUTHRIE

Mr. Tyrone Guthrie, Producer at the Old Vic, gave a formal lecture on Shakespearean Production. Dealing first with production in general, Mr. Guthrie said that a producer should seek not to impose his own personality but to evoke the most personal contribution possible from each member of his cast. The drama was essentially a composite art, and it was silly to expect a dramatic performance to have the same kind of unity and individuality

as a painting. The thing to aim for was a vaguer fusion of personal interpretations, apprehensible as a whole by the audience as a whole. "The longer I work in the theatre," he said, "the more convinced I am of the wisdom of the public in insisting on stars. The most exciting thing one can get out of the theatre is the impact of a big personality splashing like a great wave on the back wall of the auditorium."

Turning to Shakespearean production, the speaker said that the main difficulty was to decide in what convention the plays should be produced. A naturalistic rendering was possible only with an audience of Elizabethan mentality and a theatre of Elizabethan structure. On a projecting stage the players were in intimate contact with the audience and might overcome the unfamiliarity of the language by speaking at conversational pace and pitch, while the properties and dresses worn by the actors would provide all the requisite pageantry and spectacle. But in the large modern theatre, where the stage had retreated into a frame, pictorial illusion was indispensable, and some kind of convention had to be adopted, made clear, and accepted by the audience.

The framed stage brought the producer to a complete impasse: Irving's complicated settings entailed a vandalistic re-arrangement of scenes, and even a semi-permanent set involved the occasional dropping of a curtain, whereas all Shakespeare was written to play without a break. The necessary compromise should, he thought, be made with the least possible sacrifice of continuity.

Similarly the problem of verse-speaking had become insuperable, since introspective soliloquies had to be declaimed in the modern theatre. In any case, no absolute standards were acceptable alike to the young and to the generation which preserved ever more golden memories of its more impressionable past.

Modern naturalistic dialogue of the "cup and saucer" school gave the actor no chance to develop vocal colour and variety, and the producer would do better to concentrate on audibility and the balance of rhythm and sense, since natural verse-speaking was no longer possible.

There was no reason why Shakespeare should not be produced in modern dress, for the traditional attire of stage Hamlets, Romeos, Juliets, and Malvolios had no historical justification. Modern dress made the actors feel

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more at home and brought out the humanity of the plays by associating the characters with contemporary types instead of with great actors of the past. Professional companies had to pander to the prejudices of their audience, but amateurs should break away from such meaningless traditions.

MISS ESME CHURCH

In another lecture, Miss Church discussed the technique of production and the function of the producer in relation to his cast. The

producer, she thought, should prepare in advance a rigid skeleton of the performance and build up the details in co-operation with the actors. She emphasised the importance of pace and good grouping: a straight line, like a profile, was dramatically uninteresting. She also considered that village players could afford to be more venturesome and original; they should ignore stage directions and work out their own interpretations. The traditional rendering only existed because some great actor once invented a good bit of "business."

A PLEA FOR SOME "OLD MASTERS"

By a Correspondent

IT is a matter for surprise to me, to find how few amateur societies tackle the shows of the past generation. I refer to such plays as "Sweeney Todd," "Sixteen String Jack," "Maria Marten" and countless others who in their time have done so much to bring about the development of the theatre. "The old order changeth" and it is evident that the old touring companies have died, or have faded into obscurity. Why then should the amateur stage desert the old tradition? If only for the sake of comparison, a single presentation each season of one of these old "masters" would be well worth while. But the value of such a presentation goes far deeper than mere comparison.

One must not forget that some of our greatest players received their grounding in this pre-war drama.

To read a script brings to mind the depth of sincerity put into a part by the player. To merely read the play is exhilarating in itself. How the audiences must have loved it—to hiss the villain—to cheer the triumph of virtue over evil.

Are we not losing something in the staidness of the modern play? Were not the rollicking adventures of Sixteen String Jack of far greater entertainment value than we find in our modern thrillers? In any case, they were far more wholesome. Can a modern audience remain unmoved during the touching passages of "East Lynne"?

I find that a modern audience viewing such a presentation can be divided into two groups. Firstly the younger section who may scoff, but enjoy it all the more. Secondly the elder people who enjoy to the full, a revival of memories and an abundance of salt-water.

Modern audiences have been treated to burlesque music-hall performances of these plays of late, and this faces the producer with another problem—whether to play the show straight or as a burlesque. This is of course a matter for themselves to judge, with the reactions of their audience always in mind. I have played these shows with all the sincerity of an old timer and set the house rocking. On the other hand, when a burlesque has been the order of the day, the audience have been moved to tears.

I confess that more settings are required than is usual in the modern play, but with a few cloths, curtains and portable props, this difficulty is easily surmounted. Costumes I would refer to the ladies of the society or to a theatrical outfitter. Another point in favour, is the matter of royalty. The charges are very low and in some cases there are none. Furthermore, it is gratifying to note that such shows are definitely "box-office."

In conclusion, I would strongly advise all societies in search of something inexpensive and of "pulling power" to try one of these shows. The experience alone is well worth the trouble.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

HEBDEN BRIDGE LITTLE THEATRE.

Hebden Bridge Literary and Scientific Society have come to an arrangement with the Hebden Bridge Trades Club whereby a new Little Theatre has been created on the ground floor of their building. The stage has been re-erected, lighting arranged for stage and hall, the auditorium decorated, new window and proscenium curtains made. This Society, which was initiated in 1905, thus finds itself possessed of a thoroughly serviceable little theatre which was formally opened by Mr. Sladen-Smith on September 18th. There followed a performance of "Hail Nero" by Mary Stocks.

Forthcoming productions include "The Woman and the Walnut Tree" by Sydney Box, December 4th to 11th, 1937, and "Streets of New York" by Dion Boucicault, February 26th to March 5th, 1938.

We wish all success to this excellent Society in their new premises.

THE OTHERWISE CLUB.

This Club has again held a successful season at the Barn Theatre, Shere, and a Drama League representative attended a performance of Maxim Gorki's "Yegor Bulichoff" which was the first production of this play to be given in this country.

Mr. John Burrell produced the play with great tact and also designed the scenery. The acting attained a higher all-round standard than we have seen achieved by this Club in previous performances. Mr. Mame Maitland and Miss Kara Aldridge particularly distinguished themselves as Yegor and his daughter Shura. The play was first produced in Moscow at the Vakhtangov Theatre in 1932, and may be recommended to anyone who is interested in post revolutionary Russian drama.

The play was succeeded by "Lady Audley's Secret," also produced by Mr. Burrell. A very excellent piece of fun. Some of the actors had already appeared in "Yegor Bulichoff," and showed remarkable versatility in changing from the quiet realism of the one play to the crude melodrama of the other. In this respect we particularly commend the acting of Miss Kara Aldridge.

FILM TALENT AND THE LONDON ACADEMY OF MUSIC.

As is well-known, this Academy has a special dramatic section in addition to its ordinary music classes, and in past years has sent forth a number of talented players both for the professional and amateur stage.

The Academy announces that London Film Productions, Ltd. has undertaken to supply a Cup which will be awarded annually to the candidate, trained at the Academy, who in Mr. Alexander Korda's opinion, or in the opinion of an adjudicator appointed by him, shows the greatest likelihood of winning success on the screen. The Academy, therefore, is instructing its examiners to scrutinise all candidates, of either sex (whether being examined at the School for Grades, Medals or Diplomas) at its public examinations in Elocution, Acting and Singing, with a view to finding the necessary personality, talent and appearance.

STAGE LIGHTING SERVICE IN MANCHESTER.

On August 1st the Strand Electric and Engineering Company, Ltd., opened a Branch at 399-401, Oldham Road, Manchester.

For their customers in the North of England this marks an important step forward, bringing as it does to them the advantages of the Strand Hire service, without the disadvantages of heavy cartage costs.

Many Societies will now find a distinct saving of time when dealing with the Branch and a consequent saving of expense. A sufficient stock of HIRE equipment will be kept there to fulfil normal orders, but during the first few months it will be advisable to give as much notice as possible. Many will find it easier to visit the Branch to discuss their Lighting problems than to journey all the way to London and it is this "on the spot" convenience which will, it is hoped, make the Company's Manchester Branch the logical counterpart of their Head Office, where anything from a forty watt lamp to a complete stage equipment can be hired at a moment's notice.

OLDHAM.

The Oldham Playgoers' Club announce a One-Act Play Competition with the following objects: (1) to create interest in the one-act play and (2) to encourage amateur playwrights. The three judges will be Mr. Armitage Owen, Mr. Wardle Taylor of Samuel French, Limited, and Mr. Gerard Fay of the Rochdale Observer. There is no entrance fee, but entries must be received by December 31st, 1937. Further particulars may be obtained from Mr. J. Holroyd, 22, Shaw Road, Oldham.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUSINESS SOCIETY.

The Public Schools Business Society, which has Clubrooms at 29, Whitehall, S.W.1., has formed a Dramatic Section and their first production of "Journey's End" will be held at the Cripplegate Theatre on Thursday, November 18th. Particulars of the Society and tickets for the performance may be had from the Hon. Organising Secretary.

THIS SEASON'S RELEASES.

Since the publication of the July-September number, the following full-length plays have become available for amateur presentation: "After October," "The Unguarded Hour," "Too Young to Marry," and "Do You Remember." The amateur rights of all these plays are controlled by Messrs. Samuel French.

Messrs. James B. Pinker & Son announce several interesting forthcoming "releases," the most notable being, "Victoria Regina," "Black Limelight," "And the Music Stopped," and "Parnell." Information as to the "release" dates of these plays will be supplied on application to Messrs. Pinker, at their offices, Talbot House, Arundel Street, Strand.

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